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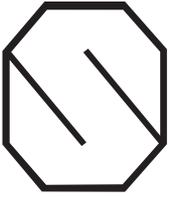
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The Story of Work: A Narrative Analysis of Workplace Emotion

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Abstract

This paper argues that work-related emotion is best accessed using indirect means, including figures of speech and narrative. An analysis of 452 narratives drawn from previously published works is presented to the end of addressing two research questions: Where is the emotion in work? and What is the emotion in work? In response to the first question, a series of prototypical work situations are isolated, all of which are heavily charged with emotion. In response to the second question, clusters of emotion associated with each prototypical situation are identified. An image of the vital dynamics of organizational life is presented based on these results, and it is argued that narrative analysis is a useful and accessible means of examining the experience of emotion in organizations.

Keywords: emotion, emotion in organizations, narrative, narrative analysis, figurative language

A Fish Story

Fineman (1996) poses an engaging question: 'Do we know what doing work feels like?' (547). The following excerpt from Garson suggests that the work of cleaning fish feels quite different from what we might imagine.

'What do you do in the cannery?' I asked.

'I clean tuna,' she said. 'The loins come past me on a belt. [Loins are the skinned, headless, tailless, halved or quartered pieces of fish.] I bone the loin and take out the dark meat — the cat food. I put the clean loins on the second belt, the cat food on the third belt and I save the bones. You're not allowed to dump any garbage till the line lady okays it. Because that's how they check your work. They count your bones and see if they're clean.

'Do you talk a lot to the other women?' I asked.

'Not really,' she answered.

'What do you do all day?'

'I daydream.'

'What do you daydream about?'

'About sex.'

'I guess that's my fault,' her boyfriend apologized proudly.

'No, it's not you,' she said. 'It's the tuna fish.'

I asked quite seriously what she meant.

'Well first it's the smell. You've got that certain smell in your nose all day. It's not like the smell out here. Your own fish next to you is sweet. And then there's the men

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touching you when they punch the tags on your back and maybe the other women on the line. But it's mostly handling the loins. Not the touch itself, because we wear gloves. But the soft colors. The reds and the whites and the purples. The most exciting thing is the dark meat. It comes in streaks. It's red-brown. And you have to pull it out with your knife. You pile it next to your loin and it's crumbly and dark red and moist like earth.'

Garson (1975: 23–24)

In this passage, the interviewee describes her job in two very different ways. Initially, she details the mechanical aspects of her job, giving us a sense of the specific tasks that her job entails. This contrasts sharply with the final paragraph, where the interviewee talks about how she responds to her work: how her entire being, in interaction with the task, makes her feel. By associating her experience of work with sex, she gives us an image that is at once vivid, rich, and visceral, and 'true' in the sense that its intimacy suggests it is true to her experience. While the first description might be useful as a guide to writing a technical document about the mechanics of the job, the second description provides an intimate insight into how the job *feels*, in both its task-related and social aspects. From this second type of account, we, as readers and as researchers, have access to a unique view of the world of work.

The project described in this paper attempts to capture this view on a larger scale, using accounts similar to this one to develop insights into the feelings people experience at work. I begin with the premise that figurative language gives us richer information about feeling than literal accounts of the same events, and that narratives, as a form of figurative language, present a tractable means of accessing this information. In the sections below, I will elaborate on these ideas and present a method for examining workplace narratives that allows the feeling embedded in them to come to the forefront. The remainder of the paper consists of an analysis of a large group of workplace narratives drawn from two previously published works.

Figurative Language and the Expression of Emotion

Emotion is communicated in many ways, both verbal and non-verbal. A great deal of emotion can be carried in a single word, a non-verbal vocalization such as laughter (Owren and Bachorowski 2003), or even in micro-movements such as gaze direction (Adams and Kleck 2003). However, the ability of language to accurately reflect experience has been a subject of considerable debate (Polkinghorne 1988; Zajonc 1998), and it poses special problems where the experience of emotion is concerned. Sandelands (1988), for example, notes that feelings and language differ in their form: whereas language expresses ideas in linear fashion, emotions occur simultaneously, in dynamic and interactive fashion. Because of this incongruence, using language to describe emotion cannot help but distort the emotion in some way. One must also question the potential of language itself to distort affective experience. For example, the words we choose to express emotion are not our own; they are learned or, as Wirshbo (1990) says, 'inherited'. Armon-Jones (1985) also discusses the thesis that emotion concepts are learned, not through introspection,

but from the outside, through the observations and evaluations of others. Hence, the use of prescribed words to label emotions not only serves to categorize those emotions, but may actually alter their phenomenological quality to suit what the speaker believes is the 'normal' experience of that emotion.

One solution to these problems is to use language in indirect ways. For example, speech disturbances such as repetitions or omissions have been used as indicators of communicator anxiety (Mehrabian 1966), and verbal immediacy has been used to determine speakers' attitudes (Wiener and Mehrabian 1968). Figurative language also presents a tractable way to access emotional experience that does not rely on direct, literal reports. In the context of psychotherapy, for example, figures of speech such as metaphors are frequently used to access emotions for which words seem inadequate, because figurative language allows for the use of non-literal representations that are not as constrained by language as convention dictates.

Emotion and the Systematic Analysis of Narratives

Narratives, which have been described as extended metaphors, fall within the domain of figurative language and are an essential part of the psychotherapeutic process for many of the same reasons that metaphors are. As per Robinson and Hawpe, 'It is one of the virtues of narrative that it can convey information indirectly which would not be understood or accepted if conveyed directly in literal and explicit terms' (1986: 122). Narratives often have embedded in them descriptions that convey powerful emotional experience without referring to feeling states per se (Burger and Miller 1999), hence they offer an excellent means of indirectly accessing emotion.

Narratives also have specific advantages that may help to overcome some of the difficulties with researching emotion. First, narratives are a very common form of human communication. Although storytelling is subject to sociocultural variation (Burger and Miller 1999), people from all walks of life can and do make sense of their experience by linking events through plot lines, thereby constructing narratives (Polkinghorne 1988). Narratives therefore offer a means of gathering information from all segments of a population regardless of age, social class, or level of literacy.

Second, the use of narratives helps us collect data that are not constrained by our data collection methods. According to Mishler (1986), narratives are a prominent and recurrent feature of unstructured interviews, but our data-gathering techniques may serve to suppress stories because interviewers cut off accounts that might otherwise become stories, and fail to record them when they do occur. If they are recorded, they are often discarded as too difficult to interpret, or split into parts to fit into predetermined coding schemes. In this light, narratives can be understood as the default, rather than the exception in subjects' responses to our questions.

Using narratives as data can also help us to conceptualize emotion in innovative ways. According to Sarbin (1989), we don't really know what an emotion is. He contends that '... it would be more fruitful to begin our inquiry

from specific observations: Who are the actors? What is the setting? When did the action take place? What did the actors do or say?' (188). It has been argued that emotions are best understood as 'narrative emplotments' (Sarbin 1989) or as living out a story line (Turski 1991). Narratives allow us think of emotions as more than single words or decontextualized phenomena. We can see them as events, plots, happenings, or in the form of dynamic human action and interaction. We can identify sequences of emotion, and look at the ways in which particular emotions are related to particular events. We can also see emotional experience as including elements of the environment, rather than being isolated within the individual. With narratives, we are not relegated to using single words to which we must force-fit experience; we have access to feeling in the form in which it is experienced.

Finally, narratives have both unique and common elements (Robinson and Hawpe 1986; Singer 1995). Common threads allow insights into the shared elements of human experience and enable general meanings to emerge from idiographic accounts. Martin et al. (1983), for example, countered the claim that organizational cultures are unique, by presenting seven types of stories that occur in a wide variety of organizations and appear to generalize across contexts and time periods.

The use of narratives in social science research also presents unique challenges. First, it requires considerable skill on the part of the researcher to collect narratives in their unaltered and unfiltered form, and diligence to record and analyze them. Second, the field of narrative analysis is extremely broad. There are numerous types of analysis in a variety of disciplines, and the researcher must of needs limit him/herself to a relatively circumscribed definition of what a narrative is and what narrative analysis is. Third, narratives are not the largest possible unit of analysis. Although they preserve much of what would ordinarily be lost in data collection and analysis, they also exclude a great deal when they are removed from the context in which they themselves are embedded. Finally, working with narrative often requires considerable interpretive work, and this may carry the analysis away from what might be termed objective and reproducible. Each of these challenges allows for considerable variation in the results of the analysis, and places an additional burden on the researcher to exercise skill, proceed with diligence, and be prepared to support with sound arguments the choices that he/she makes along the way.

Fortunately, there are excellent examples to use as a starting point. The Martin et al. study discussed previously, for example, condensed a corpus of stories to produce seven prototypes. Fitness (2000) was interested specifically in 'anger episodes' in the workplace, including the causes and consequences of anger in the organizational setting. Positive emotions and events are also receiving increasing attention. For example, Meyer (1997) categorized a set of humorous narratives into thematic groups based on the dominant theme of each story to look at the functions that humor plays in constructing an organization's culture, and Frost et al. (2000) make use a series of first-hand accounts drawn from interviews to explore the experience and expression of compassion in organizations. Finally, in what is perhaps the most compre-

hensive study of this type in the organizational domain, Gabriel (2000) uses an iterative process to condense 404 narratives of the workplace into four basic types, each having a particular emotional tone, and making use of distinct rhetorical frames.

The current study is also concerned with content analysis and the classification of stories into themes. It seeks to answer Fineman's question: 'Do we know what doing work feels like?' Given that this question inspires a simple yes-or-no answer, it is not a manageable research question in itself. However, Fineman did pose another equally engaging and much more researchable question: 'What are the essential emotionalities of working?' (1993: 216). To make this question more manageable, I have broken it down into two smaller questions:

- (1) *Where* is the emotion in work — when and where does it occur, what are the workplace events, situations, or relationships that are important enough to elicit emotion?
- (2) *What* is the emotion in work — what particular feelings are connected with those events, situations and relationships?

Methodology

This study proceeded in five steps. First, two sources of narratives about work were chosen based on the number of narratives available in these volumes, and the range of occupations of the storytellers. My first source was the book *Working* (Terkel 1972). The interviews in *Working* were collected over a period of three years, and were conducted primarily with people in working-class occupations, such as waitresses, letter carriers, miners, and policemen. Given that the book's focus is on these types of occupations, and that the book's introduction makes clear that Terkel was interested in giving voice to (a perhaps downtrodden) working class, a second book was chosen to add to what could be learned from Terkel. *Gig*, an edited volume by Bowe et al. (2000), is a compilation of interviews conducted by close to 40 interviewers. There was no set protocol, and the book claims to advance no political agenda. The range of occupations is wider than with Terkel, and includes some newer occupations, as well as some that would have changed substantially since *Working* was published.

Second, all the narratives in these two books were identified using each of the four criteria below:

- 1 A specific incident or connected series of incidents with a clearly identifiable beginning and end;
- 2 A temporal ordering of events or occurrences within the incident;
- 3 An indication by the teller that the events described are causally related;
- 4 A change in the situation, or in at least one of the characters over the course of the story.

Next the narratives were simplified into core stories. To accomplish this, a technique was adapted from the work of William Labov (Labov 1981;

Labov and Waletzky 1967). Labov was primarily interested in the structure of narratives, but he also used his method of analysis to extract core stories from interviews so that they could be compared to other stories. One of his aims in performing this analysis was to raise idiographic narratives to a level of abstraction that would show that the same plot or theme occurred across a number of contexts (Polkinghorne 1988). To isolate the core narrative in any story, Labov reduced them to only those phrases that were required to relate the experience in the same order as the original events. For example, this is the full text of a story from *Working*, told by a motel switchboard operator:

'I had one gentleman the other day and he wanted an outside call. I asked his name and room number, which we have to charge to his room. And he says, "What's it to you?" I said, "I'm sorry, sir, this is our policy." And he gets a little hostile. But you just take it with a grain of salt and you just keep on working. Inside you and in your head you get mad. But you still have to be nice when the call comes in. There's no way to let it out.' (Terkel 1972: 32–33)

and its corresponding core narrative:

'I had one gentleman the other day and he wanted an outside call. I asked his name and room number. He says, "What's it to you?" I said, "I'm sorry, sir, this is our policy." He gets a little hostile.'

Next, the core narratives were sorted into groups. The model for this step was provided by Agar and Hobbs' (1982) concept of themal coherence. Analyzing text for themal coherence is to identify recurring themes in that text. Many studies in clinical and organizational research have focused on identifying plots or themes that reoccur across stories. This idea is used in psychotherapy research to map out the connections among the various stories a client tells (e.g. Ingram 1994), or to isolate the recurring plots in a client's overall life story (e.g. Hölzer and Dahl 1996). In organizational research, a common method has been to use an inductive approach, for example grouping narratives into categories by theme (see Martin et al. 1983; Butterfield et al. 1996; Meyer 1997 for some examples). In the present study, the process of sorting the narratives into themes was accomplished by following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) guidelines for categorizing units of data. The core narratives, recorded on index cards, were continually compared to each other and sorted into groups at higher and higher levels of abstraction until a limited number of plot categories emerged. These became the essential 'stories of working'. When this sort was complete, the stories were reshuffled and given to an independent coder along with the category descriptions. The second coder used these predetermined categories to sort the stories again as a reliability check on the first sort.

The final step was to isolate the emotions connected to each story category. For guidance, I referred again to the work of William Labov (Labov 1981; Labov and Waletzky 1967). One of the parts of a narrative he identifies as essential to a complete story is an evaluation: an expression of the narrator's attitude toward, or feelings about, the content of the narrative. According to Labov, a story without an evaluation lacks significance because it has no point. Therefore, we can think of the evaluation of a narrative as the point of

the story, or the essence of what the narrator is trying to communicate. For this study, only direct statements of evaluation were used. These are statements in which the narrator offered a comment on the story. In general, these statements did not advance the action in the narrative and did not give any information that was not already included in the story. I refer again to the example used earlier:

'I had one gentleman the other day and he wanted an outside call. I asked his name and room number, which we have to charge to his room. And he says, "What's it to you?" I said, "I'm sorry, sir, this is our policy." And he gets a little hostile. But you just take it with a grain of salt and you just keep on working. Inside you and in your head you get mad. But you still have to be nice when the call comes in. There's no way to let it out.' (Terkel 1972: 32–33)

The evaluative statement is that portion of the text in which the narrator comments on what occurred:

'Inside you and in your head you get mad. But you still have to be nice when the call comes in. There's no way to let it out.'

Evaluative statements were extracted from all narratives within each category, and the common themes and emotions in each group of statements were identified. This process is an interpretive one, hence the identification and summarization of emotions is to be understood as more creative than objective. To assist the reader, I have included, in the results section, samples of the quotes from which the interpretation of emotion was made, so that readers can make their own alternative assessment of their emotional essences.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study are presented as follows. First, the results for the stories in *Working* are presented. The most prominent categories of stories in this book are discussed, including a review of the evaluative statements drawn from the stories in that category and the emotions expressed therein. Next, the results from *Gig* are presented. Following this, there is a general discussion emphasizing the common themes between the two books.

Working

A total of 251 narratives were drawn from *Working* and condensed into 13 distinct categories, beyond which no further reduction was possible. I wrote a brief description of each category and gave these to a second coder along with the stories in random order. The second coder placed 223 (88.8%) of the stories in the same categories as I did. Disagreements were resolved by discussion, and ultimately there were 18 (7.2%) stories that we were unable to agree on. Ten (4%) of the stories were placed in a miscellaneous category because neither of us felt that they fit well in any of the categories. In the interest of space, only the four most prominent categories (as determined by the number of stories in these categories) are discussed in full.

Table 1: Narrative Categories for *Working*

Category (n)	Description	Emotion themes
Equity I: Inequitable situations (21 – 9.4%)	Situations in which workplace outcomes are not in line with inputs	Resigned acceptance of the way things are Feeling unappreciated Disappointment at not being thanked for competent work
Equity II: Discrimination (12 – 5.4%)	Discrimination based on race, sex, age, etc.	Overt and covert anger moderated by fatigue and resignation Detachment from self – from own feelings and responses
Power I: Overt power struggles (17 – 7.7%)	Open conflicts entailing outright hostility or discontent	Desire to be free of bonds or free of control Desire to be left alone Sense of finality Mood of accomplishment Little sense of strain Firm statements about the self and the limits of one's tolerance
Power II: Covert power struggles (13 – 5.8%)	Subtle interpersonal power struggles in which open conflicts did not occur	Images of a pressure cooker or impending explosion Fantasies of violence Attribution of sinister motives to others Passivity tinged with sarcasm and bitterness Resentment
Success (29 – 13%)	Having work-related success, or overcoming an obstacle	No coherent emotion themes in this category
Trust I: Violations of typical workplace norms of trust (13 – 5.8%)	Transgressions of generally accepted behavioral rules that govern the psychological contract between coworkers	Desire for revenge against the transgressor, including realistic plans for revenge Anger Disgust Surprise at the questionable standards of the transgressor Disappointment Indignation
Trust II: Violations of interpersonal norms of trust (11 – 4.9%)	Severe transgressions such as robbing, cheating, or tricking someone else	No coherent emotion themes in this category
Ideology (23 – 10.3%)	Ideologically based conflicts or disputes, and the intersection of personal values or beliefs and organizational responsibilities	Images of killing or consumption Disgust and loathing of others Self-loathing Sense of nobility Regret or guilt for not being able to do the job properly, even when the work was personally objectionable
Support and solidarity (23 – 10.3%)	Giving or getting help, developing relationships, and establishing unity in a work group	Reflections about time: taking time for others, remembering, and being remembered Struggle between giving in to emotions and remaining detached Sorrow Empathic distress Regret Belongingness Communion

Table 1 *Continued*

Death and danger (19 – 8.5%)	Death, injury, or danger encountered on the job	Anticipatory or retrospective fear Desperation Helplessness Barely contained emotion
Feeling small (17 – 7.6%)	Narrator is made to feel less than important by being humiliated or doubted, or by having complaints, concerns, desires, illnesses or injuries ignored	Anger, often tinged with a caustic bitterness Feeling insignificant or invisible Resentment at being made to feel naïve or childlike Feeling silenced and defeated
Life (16 – 7.2%)	Stories about the connection between career/job and life overall	Expression of feelings toward work in terms of a life-long relationship Reflective sense of fulfillment
Status (9 – 4.1%)	Issues and problems arising from the prestige of the narrator's job relative to the occupations of others	Rejection Self-doubt. General uncertainty

Equity I: Situations in which Outcomes do not Match Inputs

These stories were about situations in which the outcomes of work did not match the worker's inputs. They included situations in which someone was not being compensated or rewarded adequately, stories about punishment or censure that the narrator felt was undeserved, and also stories about jobs that pay extremely well relative to the amount of work required.

The evaluative statements from these stories are exemplified by the statement: 'You had no chance at all' (128). While the narrators expressed their belief that work really ought to be fair ('He gets back zero from having invested so many years playing the game' (523); 'That's *her* reward for being so faithful, obedient' (351)), their statements also had a tone of resignation, as though they felt there was nothing they could do to right the inequity and were prepared to do whatever the job required however little they liked it ('You have to spend your own time to go in there and answer the complaint' (205)). In many of the statements, narrators mentioned feeling unappreciated: that they believed they were good employees, that they were disciplined and reliable, and that they expected little in return, but were disappointed that they were never thanked.

This category demonstrates that workplace equity is not as straightforward as might be assumed. The stories indicate that people have a strong sense of what they *should* get out of work. This sense of equity was not usually expressed in terms of financial compensation, but in terms of time, recognition, respect, trust, and on-the-job privileges. Although many of the narrators mentioned that they wanted appreciation for what they did, they offered no clues as to how this might be quantified, or how individual needs or ideas of equity might be dealt with using traditional concepts.

Equity II: Discrimination Stories

The stories in this category were about various types of discrimination. It was not always overt; in many of the cases, people suspected discrimination, but were not entirely sure that it was happening. Sometimes this suspicion was

expressed as a nagging doubt, as something the person didn't want to believe but couldn't help but consider. The evaluative statements in these stories can be summed up by the phrase: '... sometimes you can't do anything right for 'em' (474). Although outright anger marked many of the statements ('By that time you felt like kickin' her right in the mouth' (474); 'I said: "*Me* watch it? Fuck that! Let *him* watch it"' (69)), there was also a distinct sense of resignation born of fatigue. These people had experienced this type of discrimination enough times that although they felt angry, they were so accustomed to the ill treatment that the anger had become almost routine: 'He didn't say anything to the white fellow in the auto who was really blocking everything. He had to say it to me. I knew what the reason was' (205); 'They feel they shouldn't ask them to do this type of work, but they don't mind askin' me' (116).

These stories illustrate the truly hopeless situations in which workers sometimes find themselves. In almost all of these stories, the narrators had a choice only between complete submission and outright rebellion. There was no room to maneuver, no space in which they could maintain some dignity and *also* keep the job. These stories also illustrate the need to reconsider workplace equity. When we discuss discrimination, we customarily do so in terms of quotas and categories. We consider the circumstances surrounding the exclusion of certain people from particular jobs or opportunities, and we think of the ideal of a diverse workplace with a variety of views and sources of ideas. These stories put a different face on discrimination: one that reveals its phenomenology in the context of face-to-face interactions. Discrimination often occurs in the context of private interactions where there are no witnesses or observers, and in which the victims may be unsure that they are experiencing discrimination, indicating that these are not situations that are amenable to quantification at the organizational level. Discrimination needs to be considered at the personal and interpersonal levels as well, where the goal is not to make quota or to introduce diversity, but to ensure that people interact in ways that allow everyone to maintain their dignity.

Power I: Stories about Covert Power Struggles or Conflicts

These stories were about interpersonal power struggles in which open conflicts did not occur. Usually the conflicts were invisible on the surface, so that a third party would not have guessed that the people involved were at odds. This category is exemplified by the statement: 'There's no way to let it out' (33). Images of a pressure cooker or impending explosion were often featured, as were fantasies of violence ('I felt like taking a lead pipe to him or something' (preface II: xlii)) and the attribution of sinister motives to others ('He just wanted to cave my head in' (84)). In some cases, people retaliated by taking a passive stance, letting the other party boil over so that the narrator would be in the superior position. In these cases, the evaluative statements had a sarcastic tone, as though the victory had a bitter, hollow feel. Resentment was a common theme, although people never discussed what they would have done had they not felt constrained. Overall, the statements evidenced the strain of approaching a boundary the narrator did not want to cross, and the difficulty of trying to contain or conceal emotion.

This category gives evidence of the contests continually taking place beneath the surface of the visible organization. Much of it remains in the realm of fantasy and imagination, and the subtle use of strategy and covert attempts to maneuver oneself into the superior position show that there is a great deal of conflict not evident to the passive observer. At the same time, the tense and sometimes violent nature of these narrators' thoughts and fantasies and the sinister motives they attributed to others are testimony to the strong emotions that attend these situations. It should be emphasized that many of the conflicts were insubstantial, even trivial. They were often waged in the interest of simply having won out in that particular situation and over that particular individual.

Power II: Stories about Overt Power Struggles or Conflicts

This category is exemplified by the statement: 'Free at last, thank God. I'm free of you, at last.' (91). The feelings that united these statements were a desire to be free of bonds or free of control, a desire to be left alone ('Stay out of my way, that's all. Working is bad enough, don't bug me' (preface I: xxxii)), and a sense of finality, that a situation had ended and the conflict was complete: '... and that was the end of that' (220). In contrast with the previous category, the people telling these stories made few comments about the other party and did not speculate on the intentions of the other person. Instead they made statements about themselves — about who they were ('I don't scare. I'm dumb that way' (133)), and how much they were willing to take: 'So I walked over to him and I said, "Look pal, all I do is come here and work. I'm gonna treat you like a gentleman as much as I can. You're gonna treat me the same. Otherwise you and I aren't gonna get along"' (225); 'I should have taken the insult and said: "I guess you're right." I was never able to do that' (83). There was little sense of strain, rather a mood of accomplishment and a firm statement about the self and the limits of one's tolerance.

These stories defy the image of the worker as a controlled organism whose only options are to submit to the demands of the organization or to rebel. They portray the worker as a free agent and demonstrate that there are many situations in which open conflict and outright retaliation can be adaptive. In all of these cases, the workers found ways to make room for their emotional needs without losing their jobs. Although the stories did involve a contest, the narrators were not so much striving for victory as they were taking a firm stand and making a statement about themselves. These storytellers had liberated themselves from the strain of containing emotion and clearly felt that they had accomplished something important by allowing their emotions to come to the forefront and letting this bring about a sense of empowerment and closure.

Trust I: Stories about Violations of Typical Workplace Norms of Trust

These stories are about transgressions of everyday workplace norms, and include such events as betrayal, being let down or disappointed by a coworker or colleague, or having to suffer an incompetent or untrustworthy coworker. In these stories, it was evident that the narrators believed there are 'things you just don't do' to people you work with. This category is exemplified by the

statement: 'I'm gonna be a witness against him' (571). A desire for revenge against the offending coworker was a common theme. Unlike the fantasies of violence in the Power I statements, these people had more specific and realistic plans; some had already carried out some type of retaliatory act. The dominant feelings expressed in these statements were anger and extreme disgust ('You don't take it upon yourself' (240); 'Some psychic!' (86)), surprise at the questionable standards of others ('He arrested the guy. The guy was waitin' for a bus!' (581); 'His assumption was incredible' (68)), disappointment ('They leave something to be desired' (152)), and indignation.

These stories show that people have a strong desire for trust in the workplace and for some shared standard of conduct at a very basic, interpersonal level. The strong emotions, especially surprise, that the narrators expressed, coupled with their desire for revenge against the offending party indicate that they believe it is legitimate to even the score when a violation of trust takes place, so basic are these standards. The fact that they sometimes felt disappointed or let down tells us that people expect many of the same things from workplace relationships that they do in any relationship, suggesting that a psychological contract exists among coworkers as well as between worker and organization.

Trust II: Stories about Violations of Interpersonal Norms of Trust

This category was made up of stories about more severe violations of trust, such as getting robbed, being tricked, fooled, or cheated, tricking or fooling someone else, or committing a robbery. These evaluative statements had few common threads running through them. In several of the statements, the narrators expressed disbelief or surprise about what had happened; however, what characterized this group of statements overall was their lack of coherence and the absence of consistency in expressed emotion.

Support/Solidarity: Stories about Giving or Receiving Help or Support

These stories were about getting or giving help, developing relationships, and establishing unity in a work group. They were often about something as simple as giving affection to someone else in the course of one's work but included larger-scale acts such as banding together as a group to achieve some common goal.

The hallmark evaluative statement for this category is: 'She stays on my mind, but I don't know why' (502). Many of the statements in this category were about taking time ('This guy has time to be a human being' (225)), making time ('If she's sick, I have to fly back' (502)), remembering ('Oh, how that affects you! I have letters from 'em yet' (482)), and being remembered. Sometimes people struggled between giving in to their emotions and remaining detached from their work ('Sad. But this is an eight-hour-day thing. I can walk away from the job and not worry about it' (500); 'Though I care about him very much — I don't know. It's like a game of ping pong. I haven't decided yet' (493)), but more often they expressed the strong emotions of sorrow, empathic distress ('She wants some attention. And that way she's just aging ... If they come to take her out sometimes ...' (503)), regret at having to leave ('That's the worst, to leave them. That's really hard' (482)), belong-

ingness ('I had to belong to somebody and this was it right here' (13), and communion ('That's the first time I've seen unity on that line ... It was really nice to see, it really was' (163)).

Emotions in these stories ran the gamut. Taken as a group, they illustrate the centrality of human involvements to the emotional life of the workplace and the range of deep emotion that goes along with working with others.

Gig

There were 201 stories identified in the book *Gig*. I agreed with my fellow coder on the category assignments for 176 (87.5%) of the stories. There were 10 (5%) stories on which we were unable to agree, and 15 (7.5%) of the stories were placed in a miscellaneous category. The most prominent categories are discussed in detail below.

Table 2: Narrative Categories for *Gig*

Category (n)	Description	Emotion themes
		Other-directed emotion statements emphasizing the boundary between the narrator and the other party
Conflict I: Cross-level conflict (21 – 11.9%)	Overt and covert conflicts in which there is a power imbalance between the parties to the conflict	Shock Anger Desire to aggress
Conflict II: Lateral conflict (15 – 8.5%)	Overt and covert conflicts between the narrator and a person of the same effective hierarchical level such as a coworker, peer, or stranger	Disappointment Guilt Sense of loss Resignation
Progress and promise (34 – 19.3%)	Accomplishment or achievement in the workplace	Pride Excitement Joy
Frustration (33 – 18.8%)	Situations in which the narrator felt effectively powerless because of a lack or loss of control over workplace events.	Bitterness and anger Disillusionment / disenchantment Loss of faith in the system or the company Fatigue Resignation
Making connections (29 – 16.5%)	Helping others and receiving help from them, sharing understandings, communicating across barriers, developing relationships over time	Feeling honored at being allowed to help Excitement Happiness Sentimentality
Crime, ethics, and morals (27 – 15.3%)	Transgressions of legal and moral boundaries, and decisions or dilemmas with a moral or ethical component	Disgust Disbelief Gallows humor Strong emphasis on rationale behind emotions being expressed
Death, danger, and disgust (17 – 9.7%)	Being in danger, or suffering an injury on the job, witnessing or hearing about a fatality. Includes distasteful or regrettable workplace events such as being required to handle human or animal remains	Stories included few evaluative statements from which to extract emotion

Conflict I: Cross-Level Conflict

Conflict continued to be a prominent theme in the stories from *Gig*, although the subcategories emerged differently from those in *Working*. The stories in the current subcategory entailed a conflict, either open or covert, in which a power imbalance existed between the parties in conflict. In these stories, the transgression of personal and professional boundaries was frequently evident, as were violations of trust and other aspects of the psychological contract. The feelings expressed in the evaluative statements are captured in the statement 'I don't let 'em get away with that. It makes me mad' (22). Statements in this category were generally other-directed, placing the other party in the conflict in opposition to the narrator. In most cases, the narrators used the stories to make clear the division between themselves and the other party, often by questioning the firmness of the other party's grasp on reality ('These people are crazy' (22)), level of intelligence ('Talk about stupid' (295), 'People are so freakin' stupid sometimes' (134)), level of cognitive or work-related ability ('... but it was a joke. Just a joke' (249), 'She was totally incompetent' (51)), or general character ('What kind of person does that?' (415)). Narrators also talked about the ways they separated themselves from others, by withdrawing ('I'm not a kid anymore. I'm a big man. So I just walked during lunch' (51)) or retaliating ('But sometimes you just lose it' (163)). The emotions expressed here were stronger and more caustic than those in the previous category. Shock, anger, and the desire to aggress appeared frequently, while expressions of guilt and feelings of loss were conspicuously absent.

These stories offer an illustration of the way the social fabric of the workplace is reproduced through narrative. These narratives are structured as 'us against them' tales, in which the narrators struggle to maintain the division between 'us' and 'them'. Although the conflicts were not necessarily more severe than those in the previous category, the schisms or breaks between the people involved were much more serious. The narrators frequently expressed the belief that the other person in the conflict was from a different world. They did not muse sorrowfully about what they could have done to change the trajectory of the conflict, but instead questioned the sanity and morality of the other party, who is so clearly not 'one of us'.

Conflict II: Conflict with a Coworker, Peer, or Stranger

These stories were about overt and covert conflicts between the narrator and a person of the *same effective* hierarchical level. The evaluative statements in this category are summed up in the statement 'He walked away, but he was annoyed that I let him down' (231). Occasionally the sentiments expressed were other-directed, expressing disappointment ('... if that's not happening between you and your partner, you become less and less interested in the process' (215)) or questioning the standards others held for themselves: 'That's not the way you do it'; 'They never, never should have used the union like that' (34). However, more often the emotions were directed at the self. Guilt ('It bothers me, and it will probably bother me till I die' (438)), regret ('... that was fucked up on my part' (332)), and a sense of loss ('And we were

tight since I was nine years old. And now we don't even speak a word to each other' (321)) were common. Occasional expressions of disillusionment or bitterness were usually paired with statements that reflected resignation: 'I just couldn't take it' (67).

When the structure of authority between two people is ambiguous or non-existent, the conflicts that arise between them take on a unique dynamic. The rules of the game are unclear, and a high level of understanding, synchronization, and trust is needed for the interaction to be satisfying to both parties. The game becomes as one played on a teeter-totter, where small movements in either direction can effect a potentially disastrous imbalance. The stories in this category also show that people of the same ostensible organizational level invest a great deal in each other, feeling let down or disillusioned when a balance fails to be maintained. The self-directed emotions expressed in the evaluative statements for this category indicate that the narrators internalized these conflicts, experiencing them as very personal, and often suffering a feeling of genuine loss as a result.

Progress and Promise

These stories were about accomplishment at work and the cost of that achievement. There were stories about hard work, in which the narrator spoke of the long and difficult journey to some valued end, stories about making or creating something, such as starting a new business, designing or manufacturing something original, or devising a new procedure, and general stories about successes, both small and large.

The statement that best illustrates the emotions in these stories is 'And for me that was a terribly exciting, uplifting moment. In an area I knew almost nothing about, I was able to accomplish that' (408). Pride was the feeling that appeared most frequently in these statements, although the word itself was never used. Excitement was also a dominant theme ('It's hard not to be excited about this stadium' (485); 'The thrill is getting the person arrested on the floor in front of everyone. And with these guys we did that, we nailed them' (353); 'It just blew me away' (225)), while quiet satisfaction was less common: 'It was pretty fun' (222); 'I think that's really nice' (136). Overall the statements were largely reflective and self-focused, with an emphasis on the narrator's own feelings of joy and excitement. At the same time they rarely failed to mention the influence of outside forces, especially other peoples' input, in bringing about those emotions: '... here was this great guy encouraging me to do what I really wanted to do' (118); 'It was so — it meant so much to me. I'm sitting next to this guy who I would call a legend' (225); 'The editor said it was the best piece of celebrity ass they've ever seen' (241).

Clearly the events described in these stories were a source of joy and satisfaction for the narrators. However, it appears that the events themselves were not always sufficient to generate these feelings. In order for the narrator to experience positive feelings for a job well done or a feat accomplished there had to be an act of closure, or outside evaluation, in the form of the acceptance of a piece of work by another person or group, or a positive response to the work by someone other than the narrator.

Frustration: Stories about Being or Feeling Ineffective on the Job

In these stories, the narrators talked about workplace situations in which they were frustrated to the point of feeling effectively powerless. Many of them believed that their jobs exceeded reasonable boundaries in terms of time and responsibility. Some were frustrated by their inability to satisfy others, and others felt ineffective because they believed their efforts had been doomed from the start. A statement that illustrates the key emotions expressed is 'There was something exhausting about the whole process, changing everything so many times in order to make everybody happy' (223). Although there was evidence of bitterness and anger in many cases ('I mean, fuck, he's fourteen years old!' (418); 'It's absurd ... There's just so much bullshit' (125)), the overriding emotional themes were fatigue, disillusionment, and resignation. Narrators felt they couldn't make a difference ('It leaves you feeling sort of helpless and hopeless, really' (58)), that they had become disenchanted with aspects of their work ('While you know it's all entirely meaningless. It's completely monetary' (247); 'I don't trust them anymore. And I've lost faith in the Internet, and this whole idea of all its bountiful uses' (59)), and that they felt trapped: 'If they want you, you just can't escape' (348). Their resignation was frequently accompanied by a sorrowful acceptance of 'the way things are' ('... but it's part of the job' (258), '... that was a lesson I had to learn. I had to go through that' (438)), but more often they emphasized the unpredictability of their outcomes, and questioned this state of affairs: 'And I still get people yelling at me' (481); 'You just can't anticipate how the public is going to react' (469).

Through these stories, the narrators demonstrated their desire for an equitable relationship with their work. The inability to predict rewards, given a certain level of effort, is clearly a source of distress for them, and their efforts to rail against this instability appears to cause even greater frustration. Despite their claims that they had learned the 'rules of the game' in their respective domains, the sense of resignation and hopelessness many of these narrators expressed belies their apparent calm acceptance of 'the rules', suggesting that the frustration they feel continues to cycle on itself.

Making Connections: Stories about the Human Side of Work

These stories were about giving and receiving help, and finding moments in the rush of the day to understand others as people. The interactions ranged from small passing kindnesses to large-scale assistance that extended over a long period. They included being with others in difficult times, easing their burden of pain, protecting them and helping them reach their potential. Evaluations in this category can be summed up by the statement: 'It was a great honor to be able to help her' (529). The emotions expressed were predominantly positive, including excitement ('My daughter is about to have a fit' (336), 'Can you imagine getting a letter like that?' (230)), happiness ('... that was great' (80), 'It's been a real pleasure, by and large' (121)), and tender sentimentality ('A smile is an evaluation. It tells you you're all right' (3); '... in a way, it was kind of sweet' (172)). Quiet satisfaction ('I mean, she's happy. Why not, you know?' (515); 'I'm glad I was there to make a difference' (505))

sometimes masked the amount of effort required to establish these connections, which was often considerable. In general, however, the narrators believed it was worth the effort. As one storyteller said about helping a young mother grieve her infant child, ‘... there just isn’t any reward greater’ (529).

The stories in this category demonstrate the undeniable importance of the human element in work. Staying connected to others is a vital and inspiring part of our everyday work lives, one that frequently works its way in between the cracks of our nominal work tasks. Connections are not made passively as a byproduct of doing work, but are worked at and maintained, sometimes through considerable effort and sacrifice. Despite this, people do it gladly, and it is plainly understood as one of the great privileges of a life lived in contact with others.

General Discussion

The range of situations and emotions in these narratives makes it difficult to summarize what has been learned about emotions in the workplace from this material. However, three overarching themes appear in both books, and these seem to be important and enduring aspects of the emotional life of the workplace. These themes are significant in the context of this study because so much emotion attaches to them, and if there are conclusions to be drawn from this project about the ‘essential emotionalities of working’ they are these:

The Theme of Balance

Many of the stories in both books centered on the establishment and maintenance of balance, both in the narrators’ relationships with others, and in their relationships with their work. Although this is not a new topic in the study of organizational life, the stories in this study give us tangible examples of the ways in which balance is sought after and maintained.

Balance in the present context refers to our status and power relative to others, the trust we have in others and what we believe we have a right to expect from them, the tension that develops in our relationships and the release of that tension, as well as the feeling that one is deriving from one’s work what one believes is fair. It goes without saying that stability in such matters as equity, trust, and power is rarely if ever achieved, and as a result the balance we strive for in our work lives is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated. In addition, what constitutes equilibrium is not clear. For example, equity, or fairness, was a prominent theme in both books, but from these narratives we see that workplace equity is a concept that defies quantification. The narrators rarely mentioned monetary compensation, and were unable to specify with precision what *would* be fair, although they had strong opinions about what they felt was not. As a result, the equation for what is and what is not a fair and equitable return-on-effort continues to elude those who would design work along these lines.

The Theme of Silence

This study suggests that a sizeable portion of organizational life plays itself out quietly, either in the context of one-on-one interactions, or solely in the minds of the narrators. We do not see or hear much of what the people in these stories experience, yet there are forceful, sometimes overwhelming emotions that accompany these experiences. In many of the stories, the narrators chose to do and say nothing about the way they felt. In some cases they simply felt constrained, not wanting to jeopardize their position or upset the balance between themselves and another coworker. The equity and frustration stories, for example, indicate that people often resign themselves quietly to inequitable situations. Their feelings of unfairness or discrimination passed unnoticed, and in some cases the victims continued to perform their work as they always had, meaning that even their response to the inequity was silent. There were other situations in which the narrators were unsure about what had happened, and because the interaction was private, they had no witness with whom they could test their social reality. Because many of these people gave in to the status quo and grudgingly learned to accept it, one wonders what becomes of these feelings and the strain they placed on the individuals involved.

Remaining outwardly silent did not of course mean that the narrators left things at that. One of the ways in which they coped with violations against them was to let their imaginations run wild. From fantasies of the dreadful misfortunes that might befall the transgressor to the concrete plans for revenge that the narrators fashioned, there was little they had not already accomplished in their minds. In addition to providing rich insights into the emotions that can occur because of what might be called 'minor incidents', these stories also give us excellent examples of the utility of narrative as a vehicle for expression and the release of tension.

The Theme of Boundaries

A final theme that appears in these stories is the theme of boundaries, their establishment and maintenance through action and through the rhetorical exercise of constructing and recounting narrative. Many of the narrators, for example, wanted to make relatively explicit statements about who they were as individuals, what their values and limits were, what they wanted to stand for, and what they wanted their efforts to represent. These definitions of self take place in the context of a struggle that sets the self up against others, and so sets the self apart as unique.

Many of these stories also had as a central theme the struggle to maintain the boundary between self and work. People often find themselves at points in their work lives or careers when they must consciously consider if and how they will allow their jobs to affect them and whether they should let their jobs define who they are. Here the conflict is between communion, where the worker gives into the feelings he or she experiences on the job and allows the job to define who he or she is; and detachment, where these matters are kept separate. This can be experienced as an ongoing conflict of some intensity because the sense of communion has satisfying and affirming aspects as well

as aversive ones. The cognitive and emotional effort involved with managing this boundary give evidence of the sometimes unstable, even volatile character of the relationship between people and their jobs.

Conclusion

Sandelands and Boudens (2000) offer the insight that when people talk about their work, they rarely talk about the mechanical aspects of their jobs. The stories in the current study provide us with a broader picture of what they *do* talk about, and in turn what parts of the work give rise to its feeling. Overall, these narratives paint a picture of work experience and emotions that is different from what we are often presented with. We see from these stories that feeling at work is not a straightforward evaluative reaction to the job, but a finely textured, constantly changing product of the doing of work. The doing of work, in turn, is not as much involved with the performance of tasks as it is with interacting, transacting, and synchronizing with others. The narratives in this study go a long way toward discovering the story of work, but they also reveal that there is much more to this story yet to be uncovered.

Using narrative for this type of study has its drawbacks. The most obvious problem is that these stories are secondary data, which raises questions about how faithfully they were recorded, the manner in which they were edited, and why they were chosen for inclusion in the source books at all. There are few mundane events or routine details in either of these books, hence it is safe to assume that only the more colorful parts of the various interviews were included in the books. As a result, the data used for this study is likely skewed toward those elements of work life that not only give rise to the most emotion, but are the most interesting to hear about. Both Fineman (1996) and Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) have called for a greater focus on the mundane emotions that occur in everyday organizational life. Given the source of the data, the current study may not contribute much to the advancement of this cause. In addition, Gabriel (2000) has demonstrated that the same event may be recounted in different ways. Stories are, of course, attempts to persuade, and with the stories in this study, there is no objective recounting of the facts against which to evaluate how and how much the narratives are embellished. As a result, we are forced to take them at face value, which is at once a disadvantage and something of a gift. Finally, stories occur only at the fault lines of organizational life, when things take a turn in an unexpected direction. Because these events are often negatively balanced, positive events and emotions may be under-represented in a project that takes narratives as its source of data.

Future research should include similar studies using primary data so that we can continue to build on our understanding of the basic emotion scripts of the workplace. Full-length, unstructured interviews would be the ideal source for these data. In addition, we still need a better understanding of the more mundane aspects of organizational life and the emotions they might evoke: emotions such as boredom, ennui, or quiet satisfaction, as well as such

diffuse positive feelings as communion, joy, and harmony. Clearly there are many emotions not represented in the highly evocative tales included in *Working* and *Gig*, and these emotions are needed to paint a complete picture of the experience of work. Finally, narratives have been used in this study to answer specific questions, but they can also be used to answer other emotion-related questions. For example, as researchers, we are accustomed to think of emotions as discrete events, but personal experience teaches us that one emotion often leads to another and that these sequences are patterned. Extended narratives offer a unique opportunity to gain new insights into these patterns or sequences of emotion. By analyzing large groups of narratives, we can identify these patterns and address such questions as: How does one emotion evoke another? Under what circumstances does the normally expected pattern not emerge or evolve?

Narratives are finding their place in organizational research, and not without reason. They offer a way of viewing organizational life from the ground up, and building theories and developing ideas that are based on human experience. The story of work is a complex one: one that comprises millions of individual narratives. Yet these narratives are amenable to scientific analysis through many means. It is my hope that the creative use of this invaluable data source continues to enhance our understanding of working.

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